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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the experiences of a psychologist and social worker trainer from 1992-1995 as she traveled throughout Post-Peristroika Russia and Eastern Europe working with families. The author describes how being in another country caused her to adjust her notions of what is "normal," and she discusses how culture contributes to who we are. The paper briefly discusses the work of Virginia Satir, the mother of family systems theory, in this part of the world during the 1980's. The following impressions of the atmosphere were observed by the author: As Eastern European countries and Russia undergo dramatic political, economic, and social shifts, every aspect of family and personal life is affected. Today, reports indicate high levels of crime and violence among youth. There are great stresses for families because of limited family resources. There are more concerns about acting out behaviors among teens. Some of the programs which are said to have served young people well, such as Pioneer camps in the summer are now gone. Parents, especially because of their memories of Pioneer Camp, express their disappointment in this change. As these roles and family functions change the multi-generation family may be at risk but attentive parenting continues to remain strong. Social work, believed unnecessary in the former Communist republic, is now an emerging profession in these countries. The author discusses her part in helping to advance this profession during her travels. (MKA)

Family Intervention Training Programs
in Russia and Eastern European Countries

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I first visited Russia in 1992, a year after The Coup, as it is known. This period is usually described as Post-Perestroika. During the last four years, I have traveled through various Eastern European and Russia communities seeing what life is like in this time of transition and change.

Being a member of the Institute for International Connections, a national professional organization, I have been about to work with and plan I have also training programs for psychologists and social workers in many parts of the globe. This organization is built upon the work of Virginia Satir, often called the 'mother of family systems therapy.' Virginia Satir took her incredible wisdom and her unique approach to working with families to Russia in 1987. During her life, Satir had become deeply committed to the body and mind connection. She also was deeply committed to peace and social justice as a critical stage for human and global development.

In 1987, she organized a family camp experience, gathering families from Russia and the United States . At a Russian rural retreat site, Virginia Satir did her magic. She asked family after family to express who they were as a family unit. She asked a family to sculpt themselves. She then asked another family to sculpt themselves. As each family created their images and gave words to their feelings, other families could reflect on what they saw and felt. Families from such different countries saw both differences and similarities in how they went about being families and solving family stresses. Families saw themselves in other families. Families also saw other ways of being families.

Virginia Satir died in 1988 before she was able to return to Russia. Her work however has continued. The Institute for International Connections, was founded to continue her work in Eastern Europe, and is a Washington, D. C. non-profit organization that sponsors cross-national, cross-cultural programs in Eastern Europe and Russia every year. The Institute for Professional Development is a Russian-based sister organization that co-creates these programs. Together, many hundreds of Americans and people's from throughout Europe-- East and West, have gained remarkable experiences.

The varied training programs I worked with were designed to address intervention work relating to children and youth and families. I want to talk about some of my experiences in these family training programs in Russia, Romania Albania, and the Ukraine during these last years*.

The opportunity to do this training work gave me so many new insights. I made new connections, found life-long friends. I learned how people grew up during similar time periods to myself. And, I learned about how they are adapting to the changes going on and how they understand the changes around them. I have few firm conclusions about what I have heard and learned. I want to describe some of the training work and share some stories which I remember.

* One of the most common questions asked is whether I speak Russian or any other Slavic languages. During my travels, I use interpreters to speak to people and understand what they are saying to me. During training programs, we often have several interpreters because the work is very tiring and stressful. Though I know a

Countries transitioning: Perestroika

Some background context is important. For me the global political, economic and social events of the mid-1980s through to the 1990s is miraculous. In the shortest of time spans which could have been predicted, the Berlin Wall fell and the largest union of Euro-Asian sovereignties, known as the Soviet Union dissolved. Baltic countries adopted nationalist political and social models. Balkan ethnic groups initiated ethnic wars. Other Eastern European countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Chekeslovakia adopted new Constitutions and built new capitalist markets within which they seek to gain solvency and peace.

Russia, the largest geographic region to transition into democracy and capitalism has a great many challenges. For Russia, as a federation of regional districts and autonomous self-governing units, it is important to recognize that many changes are occurring in municipalities, regional areas, cities and small towns. There is no one way things are being done. This is a great change from the earlier Communist model. This may sound elemental, yet, it is not. Each new attempt at solving problems in a locale, is a contribution to the emerging Russia. This is not always easy however. For some, the change translates into uncertainty. Some of my Moscow friends say that at least before as a Communist country, people knew they would have something--something to eat or a place to work and even some food. Today, however, whether you have a job or a paycheck like the one before is not certain. A man in Siberia said that, 'For me, giving up Communism was one thing but not having any ideology to replace what we believed in or a map for how things should get done is the hardest thing for me.' How people are faring in these transition

few Russian phrases, I am not multilingual in Slavic languages. In any country I visit, I do, however, learn a few important words or phrases such as 'hello,' 'thank you,' 'please,' 'good,' and 'good-by.'

times reads like a text that might be entitled "It is the Best of Times. It is the Worst of Times." Which section gets written first only depends on the moment you are living in.

First IIC Russia Conference: 1992

The first visit outside the U. S. to a country with different languages and customs is probably the most memorable. And, culture shock is to be expected. Yet no one can tell you much ahead of time. For me, the first taxi ride initiated me. With cars driving with no regard for the painted lanes, I felt like I was in a Third World country! And, I saw tall high rises that were huge. And, the radio blared out American rock music. People's t-shirts were often from America, maybe a sports t-shirt or an American advertisement! It was hard to know where I was.

My first visit involved working with psychologists from Russia and other regions of the former Soviet Union and American helping professionals (psychologists and social workers). We spent 21 days together learning and building rich professional and personal relationships. Translators became our bridge--taking what we said and repeating the content into Russian; and then taking what our Russian colleagues said and repeating the content into Americanese. Among the things that I learned during the conference are the following.

1. Few if any social agencies exist to serve children and families.
2. The government is trying to hold together the most traditional programs such as orphanages much as was done before the changes.

3. There are needs to look for ways to fund social programs for children and families.
4. Foster care did not exist during Communism. An effort to develop foster care is underway, yet, there work has not been particularly successful so far.
5. From one role play, we learn that some of the young adults who are finding oportunities in newly emerging business ventures a are now viewing their older parents and grandparents as failures.
6. No one really knows what will happen in the future.
7. Schools, where many of the Russian participants work, are undergoing major changes as they seek to become community based and bring in parents as partners in the children's education. Even the funding of schools is extremely shakey.
8. I was deeply moved by the gentleness, kindness, and caring ways of every Russian I met. And, these qualities translated into the care of children. The adults care deeply for the children around them. Children are vital to any family, and, maybe even more so when you have only one or two. Children are doted upon. Children are given the attention of adults, supported by adults, cared for by surrounding adults. So, when a young child walked into a room, Russians attended to the child, gracefully and lovingly. I never saw nger or heavy handedness by adults to children. I was so excited to see how children were cared for!

These are some things I learned in 1992. After that conference, I visited Moscow, meeting some officials in the education field. Moscow is home to over 11 million people.

The Cheskonova's, Boris, Risa, and Olga, took me into their home. Boris and Risa are chemists, managing large chemical institutions. Their adult daughter, Olga, teaches and researches in the field of psychology at Moscow State University. She was at the conference and invited me to her home after the conference. We had spent many hours walking and talking with another new friend, Galina, a widely recognized Russian psychologist and teacher at the University of Moscow.

Much of the touring in Moscow helped me understand life during the most recent decades of Communism. I learned about Communism's centralized control of housing, education, employment, health care, and food distribution. As I walked the streets of Moscow, I saw the faces of young and old people. I observed children and parents, and children and grandparents in their everyday interactions. Most disturbing, I saw how gypsies live in Moscow as beggars. They are seen as thieves and cheats. Their lives appear very bleak. They are cast outs.

We visited Red Square--a walled in city actually. We saw many Russian Orthodox Churches throughout Moscow, though many of these churches still had huge chains and locks that were decades old. The churches in Red Square, actually museums today, held some of the most powerful icons of Russian religious life. The buildings were intriguing and beautiful.

As I walked, I saw almost no stores. Quite a few people brought their home grown foods to sell on streets. There were almost no merchandise stores as we know them. The typical 'State' stores existed where food commodities

were offered, generally only a few food items in any one day. State stores also sold used clothing and other items that were regulated in their price. I found very nice used tapestries that I brought home with me from one State store. I found the only store window in Moscow at that time--two plastic bread molds in a small window!

Stories taught me so much. One new friend recounted her hours of labor with her daughter's delivery. She described a maternity hospital where she lay uncomfortably in the hall for many hours. As she hurt, the nurses yelled at her, calling her names such as prostitute and whore. They told her these things, I was told, so she would be discouraged from considering bearing a second child. She admitted that it was several weeks before she was interested in holding her daughter--her first child; her only child. Imagine how that experience eats into the very strong value base for loving and caring for children!

It is important to understand how culture contributes to who we are. Being in a different country, I had to adjust my barometer around "what is considered "normal" among adults and children. For instance, the affect of Russian children is gentle and rather quiet. Children are rather shy. They often look excessively thin, even under-nourished. Some of the developmental milestones I am used to observing were difficult to find in the children. Children are, however, interested in the care and attention of adults, so I often was able to visit with a young person quite comfortably. One afternoon, I was on a street corner waiting for my friend, Olga. To my right, a boy, about 10 years old, came and stood by me. Since I did not speak Russian, I did not engage in a conversation. I smiled. I extended my heartfelt maternal love. I

stood there. About 10 minutes went by as he quietly stood next to me. Then, he blurted out, "Hello, my name is How are you?" Then, he ran away, proud that he actually spoke English to this American standing on the street!

Many of the families I met tell me they want their child to talk with me and practice the English they are learning at school or at home. They see this as a powerful tool for their future.

One day, Olga and I went to see an orphanage in Moscow. We spent two hours looking for an alley where we finally found this orphanage. Unfortunately, none of the children were at the orphanage. The Director of the orphanage was actually very concerned that I found the program site. She wanted to know how I found out about them and what my intentions were in visiting. I brought pencils and other things for young children and gave these to her. I asked a few questions about the current operations and then left.

When I left Moscow in 1992 after being gone nearly a month, I was ready to go home, and, ready to plan to return. So, my second and third years in Russia just added to my life. I continued to find that I could comfortably and effortlessly open my mind, my heart, and my eyes to everyone and everything around me. The second Russian training conference was set up to continue the dialogue among Americans and Russians from the previous year, though many of the Russians and Americans were different. Learning about the concept of self-development gave new ideas us around how we could view personal development over the span of one's life. Self-development theory may become an important way of understanding personal development because the idea of

self-development gets away from externalized interpretations of psychological well-being and promotes a self-reflective, introspective experience. This process is taught to children early in their life and used in the educational process and by psychologists working to help children in need. Interestingly, this process already exists in schools such as the one my son attends in Ft. Collins.

Other Emerging Countries

Dissecting what I learned from my first visit versus what I learned on my second or third visits is not possible. This is not very useful. This last year, my third year in Russia with trips to Siberia and St. Petersburg were as much of an adventure and learning experience as before. And, I had spent one year traveling to Romania and Albania, adding new dimensions to my understanding. Let me say just a few things about some of the other countries I visited during these several years, and, also say a few words about the visit to the Tyumen Region of Siberia, Russia.

Latvia

In 1992, I traveled to Latvia. I talked to officials responsible for implementing new social protection programs, poverty relief programs, and government-sponsored labor and employment policies. In Latvia, I visited an innovative technical school for teens. The Director designs the learning environment to foster expanded learning by students. Even the furniture is built to encourage students to work cooperatively more easily. Exciting!

Hungary

Like Latvia, Hungary was occupied by the Russians of the Soviet Republic. I went to the first all European social welfare conference in Debrecen Hungary. Among the people I met, Sam Dimetrie, from Ghana, Africa, and Arton, from Egypt were so fantastic. Both these men are developers of social work in developing nations!

Traveling in Hungary, whether in Budapest or Debrecen, gave me a chance to see more of the changes going on. Hungary seemed to be better off than any part of Russia I had seen.

Albania

Albania, a small country located north of Greece and south of the former Yugoslavia is the poorest European country and among the poorest countries on the globe. This country self-isolated itself during many of its years as a Communist country. This first trip to Albania included visits to a home for the elderly, an orphanage and a home for disabled latency-aged children. One new friend in Albania whose son is in the home for disabled children told me that her son's serious disabilities were the result of a poor delivery at the hospital. This boy, who just arrived in Colorado this year, has better possibilities here than in his own country.

Institutions in Albania are unable to meet many needs. They are poorly designed, extremely hot in summers and have little equipment to support the needs of clients. Emergency food was distributed by the United Nations

through much of 1991 and 1992 because there is not enough food for the people of this small country.

My first presentation to social services departmental staff in Albania described the most basic terms--social welfare, social provisions, services, programs, etc. Programs such as adoption and foster care to meet the needs of orphans are assigned low priority status for development. These types of programs can not address the larger numbers of needy Albanians. Income programs such as unemployment payments and general cash assistance are distributed to over two-thirds of the country's inhabitants.

Romania

For Holt International, an international children's agency, I studied the emerging social work educational structure and examined possible training strategies for Romanians working in Holt's family agencies. I did two training sessions, using Satir principles, much like our training in Fostering Families Core Foster Parent Training program. Both training sessions were successful and at the same time very informative for everyone.

The Romanians I met were so wonderful, eager to learn, and ready to make families work better! With few stable funding sources, each social worker or family worker I met, still held great hope for the work to be done. Some of the programs I visited included programs similar to county social service offices, though these offices were attached to the person serving as the community's Mayor, so to speak. I also visited family centers funded with U.S. foreign aid dollars. These are pilot programs designed to help Romanians

learn how to do social work and human services programs. I visited government agencies such as the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Social Protection. I met with people from UNESCO in the country and also leaders in social work education and social work practice.

The children's orphanage homes I saw were greatly improved over the one's we saw on Denver News stations just three years ago. Dixid Davis, Director for Rocky Mountain Exchange, is to be commended for her courageous and undaunting efforts to bring about very needed change for institutionalized children in Romania.

The Asian Region of Russia: Siberia

This year my colleagues and I visited Siberia, a huge Russian land mass located on the Asian continent. We were the first American social worker, psychologist, and medical health specialist invited as guests of the Tyumen Regional District of Siberia.

Every moment of the travels were filled with the warmth of the people, their generosity and graciousness. Government officials took us to three Siberian towns--Surgut in the North of the District, Tyumen, in the South of the District, and Trobolsk, an ancient town several hours northwest of Tyumen. We visited homes for aged people, family planning and health clinics, family medical facilities, community-based programs for children and youth, summer camp programs, and newly developing family centers.

My colleagues who traveled with me and I experienced a powerful spirit of caring among the Siberian officials and their new social workers. I was greatly impressed by the tender care provided to patients and clients by the professionals whether doctors, psychologists, teachers, or social workers. Great attention is being given to addressing the social needs of the District's people during Post Perestroika. Exciting new models for delivering human services emerge from this spirit. These social service programs are impressive, particularly because funds are tight throughout emerging countries where government funds are limited for everything!

During our visit, the Family Center for Tyumen was opened in a gala celebration. We were honored at this event with a ceremony where they were officially inducted as Siberians! Emerging from this visit are tentative plans to collaborate in a special conference next October 1996. This conference will address important training areas to human services development and family center work.

In Siberia, like other countries, the professionals working in social programs often have little training and professional resource materials to support them in their job. Frequently I meet a worker in a government policy position who has a background in the sciences. For example, the Deputy Minister of the Albanian Ministry of Social Protection is a former engineer. A nuclear physicist is a social worker in a Romanian family center.

The training conference in Kiev, Ukraine was an 11-day program teaching Satir's family model. Among the American participants, I was able to

have two CSU students attend along with several other Americans. There were participants from UNESCO Chernobyl family programs in Russia, Belrusa, and Russia. We also have participants from England, Australia, and Germany. This was truly a global training conference!

So much was shared and so much learned. For me, I met several people who were incredible. This year, I met Valia. She is a worker for the UNESCO Chernobyl Family Center the Ukraine, not that far from the Chernobyl plant. Valia, now 25, was 16 when Chernobyl blew. Along with over 250 other children, Valia was evacuated to Odessa, Poland, in hopes she and the other children would be protected or "saved" from the potential devastation that would occur if Chernobyl could not be contained. Valia's description of those several months in a former Pioneer camp illustrates the devastating trauma she still harbors inside her.

Everyone of us must recognize Chernobyl as a current problem requiring global response^{***}. There is still leaking radiation. People are at risk every day. Most people live as if victims--helpless, compliant, angry, hurt. I learned from many of the participants that local citizenry knows very little about the dangers of the area. Little research gets back to the inhabitants, even if they have been subjects in research studies. Most people have unexplained and untreatable symptoms, presumably tied to exposure to radiation. Food and the

^{***}According to the 1995 United Nations Report of the Children, children are killed more frequently by war than disease or other social ills. We also know that AIDS infects children in all countries, though high reports exist in African countries and in Romania. Radiation leaking from Chernobyl seeps into the ground, into the food, and into the atmosphere. At least 10,000 children and their families have migrated to Israel and are being treated medically for radiation effects.

environment continue to be radiated. There is no way to get away from the toxic environment except to leave the region and emigrate. This is difficult for a great number of people, impossible for many.

There is more I want to say about the work in the Ukraine but I will not at this time. I want to make some concluding thoughts that cut across the different countries I have not visited. So, let me move to some summary thoughts and broader generalizations.

Summary thoughts

As Eastern European countries and Russia undergoes dramatic political, economic and social shifts, every aspect of family and personal life are affected as well. Today, reports indicated high levels of crime and violence among youth. Mafia act much like gangs in the U.S. There are great stresses for families because of limited family resources. There are more concerns about acting out behaviors among teens. And, some of the programs which are said to have served young people well, such as Pioneer Camps in the summer are now gone. Parents, especially because of their memories of Pioneer Camp, express their disappointment in this change. Teens start looking like the teens of Western Europe and American, particularly as they dress in jeans and t-shirts with all kinds of advertisements and expressions painted on their clothing.

What changes in the roles and functions of family or community members are at risk? The multi-generation family may be at risk. As people exert their freedom, particularly teens and young adults, grandparents may experience detachment from the nuclear family unit. Also, at present

grandparents provide a great deal of care and support to grandchildren. During summers, I saw grandparents take their grandchildren to the dache's--summer homes in the country. Grandparents live with their adult children--or vice versa, adult children live with their parents. As time goes on, we may find fewer adults living in any one household, and thus, fewer adults providing direct care to children and youth.** Post-Communist life challenges the family though. In a family role play, Russians portray teen and young adult children who view their parents or grandparents as defective, as losers, losers because they do not embrace the drive to make money. At this year's Kiev, Ukraine conference, we listened to a leading family therapist tell us the story of one man who makes a great deal of money, and, then asks, "For what?" This man then goes on to say that he has more regard for his second son because he will emulate his model of cutthroat capitalism than his first son who is gentle, kind, and more oriented to cooperative behaviors.

I continue to marvel at the gentle, caring, attentive parenting of children--maybe because families rarely have more than one child; maybe the cultural training is so strong, maybe earlier and more contemporary religious values influences this process, maybe parents know their children will care for them in old age so there is an expectation of reciprocity, maybe because many children may not live to adulthood and therefore they are treated with great care--any of these reasons may contribute to this drive to "dote on" and shower love on children. These people love their children and believe in their children.

** Housing was so limited during Communist times that living in multi-generation units was a realistic adaptation by families. Private enterprise may foster more construction of private homes that effects the use of rental properties and state controlled properties. Further, families may want greater privacy and exert their own will more than was possible during Communist times

Social Work: An Emerging Profession

Social work, believed unnecessary in the Communist community model, is an emerging profession in these countries. Today, universities and institutes are creating social work university programs, primarily undergraduate programs. Faculty have backgrounds in psychology, sociology, law, and possibly management, etc.

This first year after Perestroika, I met varied views for the future. First, I saw some people reaching for new potential realities such as becoming successful business people. I also saw some people hoping they could continue in those ways that has served them during Communist times.

I hope that through my work in Russia and other emerging democracies, I will learn how to better do our work, new ways to understand how families, children, and communities can grow and thrive. Through the training programs offered, I will contribute what I know from our work here; and, what I learn from programs over there.

I hope I did not disappoint you by recounting some of the experiences I meet as I learn about the move to a new social and political way of life in former Communist countries. This year I continue to be involved in developing and implementing training efforts in the regions effected by Chernobyl and in Siberia. Through IIC, a Network Support Group is being established to help workers in the three country Chernobyl programs. Anyone interested can help even without having traveled to the region.

I would like to give you an opportunity to ask questions since you may have things you are interested in learning. I will close saying simply,

I travel with my prayers for Peace.

I travel within my stance of compassionate action.

I ask all of us to join together similarly to make our world
a place for children and families to live peaceably,
in a loving stance.